WAR FLYING

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WAR FLYING

WAR FLYING

BY A PILOT

THE LETTERS OF "THETA" TO HIS HOME PEOPLE
WRITTEN IN TRAINING AND IN WAR

And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.—CAMPBELL.

BOSTON
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1917

THESE—

FROM " THETA " TO HIS MOTHER

PREFACE

This little volume of " Theta's " letters to his home people is offered in the hope that it may prove useful, and not for glory or reward. The Royal Flying Corps in war-time works in secret. Many of our gallant lads would gladly become pilots if they knew how to set to work, and, approximately, what they would have to face. When " Theta " decided to try to enter the service he had nothing to go on save a determination to " get there " and a general idea of the difficulty of achieving his purpose. His careless and unstudied notes, written at odd moments in the work of training and of war, do show how a public-schoolboy may become a flying officer and how he may fare thereafter. Names, dates, and places, about which the Censor might have concern, have been concealed, and extraneous matters have been omitted. The letters are a cheery and light-hearted record, and may stimulate others. From first to last they have not contained a grumble.

It should be understood, however, that the experiences of the writer must not be taken as typical of those of all pilots at the front. The R.F.C. has different squadrons for different duties, and different types of machines suited to the nature of those duties. In the faster type of machine it is possible to do better and more dangerous work, and, even in one's own squadron, the duties of a colleague may have been more onerous and more trying than those described. In a fighting squadron the pilot may have almost daily combats in the air; in another, he may have very long and very trying reconnaissance work. "Compared with that of some squadrons," writes "Theta," "our work is pleasant."

November 26, 1916.

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ORDERED OVERSEAS

(*After Kipling*)

Does he know the road to Flanders, does he
know the criss-cross tracks
With the row of sturdy hangars at the end?
Does he know that shady corner where, the
job done, we relax
To the music of the engines round the bend?
It is here that he is coming with his gun
and battle 'plane
To the little aerodrome at—well, *you* know!
To a wooden hut abutting on a quiet
country lane,
For he's ordered overseas and he must go.

Has he seen those leagues of trenches, the
traverses steep and stark,
High over which the British pilots ride?
Does he know the fear of flying miles to east-
ward of his mark
When his only map has vanished over-side?

It is there that he is going, and it takes a deal of doing,
There are many things he really ought to know ;
And there isn't time to swot 'em if a Fokker he's pursuing,
For he's ordered overseas and he must go.

Does he know that ruined town, that old —— of renown ?
Has he heard the crack of Archie bursting near ?
Has he known that ghastly moment when your engine lets you down ?
Has he ever had that feeling known as fear ?
It's to Flanders he is going with a brand-new aeroplane
To take the place of one that's dropped below,
To fly and fight and photo mid the storms of wind and rain,
For he's ordered overseas and he must go.

Then the hangar door flies open and the engine starts its roar,
And the pilot gives the signal with his hand ;
As he rises over England he looks back upon the shore,
For the Lord alone knows where he's going to land.

Now the plane begins to gather speed, completing lap on lap,
Till, after diving down and skimming low,
They're off to shattered Flanders, by the compass and the map—
They were ordered overseas and had to go.

INTRODUCTORY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IDEA

I

THE first number of the well-thumbed file of *Flight*, carefully kept by "Theta" up to the present day, bears date July 30, 1910, just two years after the first public flight in the world. At that time this particular public-schoolboy was thirteen years of age. His interest in aviation, however, dated from considerably before that period, and its first manifestation took the form of paper gliders. Beyond the fact that they could be manipulated with marvellous dexterity and that they could be extremely disturbing to the rest of the class in school, no more need be said. In December 1910 "Theta" felt that he had a message on airships to convey to the world, and he communicated it through the medium of the school Journal. Thenceforward he wrote regularly on flying topics for the Journal, and for four years acted as its Aeronautical

Editor. Throughout 1911, with two school friends, he also assisted in producing *Aviation*, a cyclostyle sheet of small circulation proudly claimed as " the first monthly penny Aviation journal in the world." Therein the various types of machines were discussed with all the delightful cocksureness of youth, and various serial stories based on flying adventures duly ran their course. For some years he pursued the construction of model aeroplanes with an assiduity that may well have been fatal to school work and games, and that was kept up until the German power-driven model drove the elastically-propelled machines into the realms of toydom. A motley crowd of enthusiasts used to gather every Saturday and Sunday in one of the great open spaces of London for the practice of their craft—nearly all boys in their teens, occasionally one or two grown-ups with mechanical interests. When the War came the group broke up. Some of them took up real aircraft construction; others became attached to the Air Service, naval and military, as mechanics. At least two became flying officers.

In July 1911 " Theta " obtained his first Pilot's Certificate, from an Aero Club which he had assisted in founding. The document is perhaps sufficiently interesting to reproduce :

No. 1

X.Y.Z. AERO CLUB: PILOT'S CERTIFICATE

I hereby Certify that "Theta" has passed the required tests for the above-named Certificate. The tests have been witnessed by the undernamed:

R. H. W. and J. H. C.,

who are Members of the X.Y.Z. Aero Club.

The tests are as follows:—

1. Flight of 100 yards.
2. Circular flight of any distance provided the machine does not touch the ground and lands within fifteen yards of the starting-point.
3. Or (alternative) flight of any distance when machine flies not less than six feet higher than the starting-point.
4. Flight lasting at least eight seconds.

The above tests have been approved by the members of the Club.

(*Signed*) R. H. W., *Secretary*.[1]
J. H. C., *President*.[2]

The tests would have been very different a few months later, and really wonderful long-distance flights were afterwards accomplished.

In order to be able to write with some authority, "Theta" kept abreast of all developments in Aeronautics, reading with avidity all the literature on the subject and visiting the flying-grounds. The first aero-

[1] Now with the gunners in France.
[2] Interned in Germany since outbreak of war.

plane he saw in the air was when Paulhan gave a demonstration of flying at Sandown Park. Subsequently numerous pilgrimages to Brooklands and Hendon were made.

There followed visits to France in the vacations. On the second visit " Theta " and a companion, it was afterwards discovered, cycled round the rough and narrow stone parapet of a fort when a single slip would have meant precipitation into a moat on one side, or into the sea on the other. It was a test of nerves. The return from the third visit was memorable. " Theta " had left his portmanteau on a railway platform in Normandy and his waterproof on the Cross-channel steamer ; but he arrived at Waterloo serenely content with the wreck of his model aeroplane wrapped up in an old French newspaper and a bathing-towel. His knowledge of French and his customary luck, however, served him, and the missing impedimenta duly followed him up in the course of a day or two. Of his French friends—three brothers—one was killed in the opening months of the War ; a second was wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans, after an adventure that would have won him the V.C. in this country ; and the third, as interpreter, was one of the links between the Allied forces at the Dardanelles, and is now engaged on similar work.

A few months before war broke out " Theta " visited Germany and photographed the Zeppelin " Viktoria Luise " and its hangar at Frankfort. He was immensely struck by the ease with which the huge airship was manipulated, and with its value as a sea scout ; but as a fighting instrument he put his money on the heavier-than-air machines. So grew day by day, month by month, and year by year—without the least slackening—that interest in aviation which came to fruition in war time.

II

" Theta " was born in May 1897 ; the War broke out in August 1914. On his eighteenth birthday " Theta " decided that it was time to " get a move on." His ambition from the first had been to enter the Royal Flying Corps. This was opposed chiefly because of his youth and seeming immaturity and the excessive danger attached to training. But fate, impelled by inclination, proved too strong. He had been a member of his O.T.C. for four years, and had attended camps at Aldershot and Salisbury Plain ; but he deliberately set his face against " foot-slogging." He urged that though he was old enough to risk his own life he was not old enough to

risk the lives of others—his seniors—by accepting an infantry commission.

After many preliminaries an appointment was secured at the War Office with a High Official of Military Aeronautics. There "Theta" was subjected to a curiously interesting catechism which seemed to touch on nearly every possible branch of activity under the sun except aviation. Finally the High Official, probably seeing a way of ridding himself of a candidate who had accomplished little or nothing of the various deeds of daring enumerated in the Shorter Catechism, suggested an immediate medical examination on the premises. That ordeal safely passed, "Theta" returned to his catechist, who said wearily, "Well, we'll try you, but you know you have not many of the qualifications for a flying officer." "Theta" returned to school to await his summons, which was promised within two months. The school term ended; a motor-cycling holiday in Devon followed—and still no call. On the return to London a reminder was sent to the War Office. There immediately came a telegram ordering "Theta" to report for instruction at what may be called Aerodrome "A."

Training began almost at once with a joy-ride of ten minutes' duration. But the weather

was for the most part what the aviators in their slang call "dud." An "abominable mist" hung over the aerodrome, and consequently, though the period of instruction was fairly prolonged, the opportunities for flights were few. There was much waiting and little flying, and the bored youth was driven to music and rhyming to fill up the interstices. But before the end of the year a good deal had been accomplished. At the close of his eleventh lesson "Theta" was told to hold himself in readiness for a "solo" performance.

After four more flights came the successful tests for the "Ticket" which transforms the pupil into a certificated aviator. This preliminary triumph was celebrated the same evening by a joy-ride at nearly 2,000 feet, the highest altitude that "Theta" had reached on a solo performance. Nearly four years and a half had elapsed between the schoolboy "Ticket" and the real thing.

Then came a transfer to another and more advanced type of machine. On this there were but three flights with an instructor, and then another "solo" performance. Towards the close of the year "Theta" left Aerodrome "A" for Aerodrome "B," having in the meantime been gazetted as a probationary second lieutenant, Special Reserve.

The advanced course occupied about three months. It proved more exciting in many ways. In the elementary portion of training "Theta" saw many "crashes," none of which, however, proved fatal. In the second, war conditions more nearly prevailed, and at times—when, for example, three colleagues lost their lives in flying, and a Canadian friend who shared his hut in training was reported "missing, believed killed," within a few weeks of reaching the front—the stern realities of his new profession were driven home.

But youth is ever cheerful and optimistic. In fulness of time there came a flight of a covey of seven "probationaries" in one taxicab to an examination centre for "wings," a successful ending, followed shortly afterwards by final leave, an early-morning gathering of newly made flying officers at Charing Cross Station, the leave-taking, and the departure to the front.

Training was over; the testing-time had come. Before his nineteenth birthday was reached "Theta" had been across the German lines.

His letters may now be allowed to "carry on."

BOOK I

IN TRAINING

(October—April)

I

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Early Impressions.

ARRIVED here O.K. and reported. Spent the best part of the morning signing papers and books, and buzzing around. On the way across to the hangars discovered two R.F.C. men lying on the ground trying to look like a mole-hill, and fidgeting with a gadget resembling an intoxicated lawn-mower, the use of which I have not yet discovered. Am posted to "A" Flight (and wondering when I am going to get it, so to speak). You report at six o'clock if you are on the morning list; at nine o'clock if you are not. When you report possibly you go for a joy-ride, weather and number of pupils permitting. You spend some time in the shops, followed by a lecture and then drill. At four o'clock you report again. If it's fine, and the officers don't feel too bored with life, they may take you for a flight, but it is generally some one else they take and not you. Then you smoke till 5.30 p.m., when you

go home. However, I'm enjoying myself, and the pupils seem a decent lot. I don't think there will be anything doing for the next few days, as there is an abominable mist all over the place. The machines are the safest in the world.

• • • •

Have had a ten minutes' flight this evening. It was splendid, and felt perfectly safe. Machine seems quite simple to control. I had my hands on the dual set, and felt how the pilot did it. Don't expect I shall get up again for a long time. I was quite warm, and felt happy, calm, and confident.

• • • •

My First Flying Lesson.

My first flying lesson was in the gathering dusk of a cold evening, but an extra leathern waistcoat and an overcoat and muffler kept me warm. I mounted to my seat behind the pilot in the nacelle of the huge biplane, fastened my safety belt, donned my helmet, and sat tight.

A duologue ensued between the pilot and the mechanic who was about to swing the propeller and to start the great 70-h.p. Renault engine.

"Switch off," sang out the mechanic.

" Switch off," echoed the pilot as he complied with the request.

" Suck in," shouted the mechanic.

The pilot moved a lever. " Suck in," he echoed.

The mechanic put forth his strength, and turned the propeller round half a dozen times or so to draw petrol into the cylinders.

" Contact," he shouted.

" Contact," came back the echo from the pilot as he switched on.

A lusty heave of the propeller, and the engine was started.

For a moment the machine was held back, while the pilot listened to the deep throbbing of the motor, and then, satisfied with its running, he waved his hand, and we began to " taxi " rapidly across the aerodrome to the starting-point. The starting-point varies almost every day, as the rule is to start facing the wind. Then we turned, the pilot opened the throttle wide, and a deep roar behind us betokened the instant response of the engine. With the propeller doing its 900 revolutions a minute we were soon travelling over the ground at 40 m.p.h. The motion got smoother, and on looking down I found to my surprise that we were already some thirty feet above the ground. A slight movement of the elevator, and we started to climb in earnest.

A couple of circuits and we were 700 feet up.

The pilot looked round and signalled to me to put my hands on the controls. I did so, and then—apparently to test my nerves—he started doing some real sporting " stunts," dives, steep-banks, and so on—in fact, everything but looping the loop. However, it did not occur to me at the time to be nervous, I was enjoying it so much. And so at last the pilot, who kept casting furtive glances at me, was satisfied, and taking her up to 1,000 feet put her on an even keel, and took both his hands off the controls, putting them on the sides of the nacelle and leaving poor little *me* to manage the " 'bus." This I did all right, keeping her horizontal and jockeying her up with the ailerons when one of the wings dropped a little in an air pocket. On reaching the other side of the " 'drome " he retook control, turned her, and let me repeat my performance.

Then, again taking control, the pilot, after a few more stunts, throttled down till his engine was just " ticking over," and did a *vol plané* from 1,000 feet into the almost invisible aerodrome. A gentle landing in the growing darkness and rising fog, a swift " taxi " along the ground to the open hangar, and my first lesson in aerial navigation was concluded.

The teaching methods may be considered rather abrupt, but they are those adopted now by all the flying schools. The pupil is taken up straight away on a dual-control machine to a height of about 1,000 feet, and then is allowed to lean forward and amuse himself with the second set of controls, any excessive mistake being corrected by the pilot. After a time he is allowed to turn unaided, to do complete circuits unaided, and finally to land the machine unaided. If he does this successfully he is sent "solo," and after a few "solos" is sent up for his "ticket" or Royal Aero Club Certificate. At the time of writing I am doing circuits unaided, but I hope, weather permitting, to have come down unaided by the time this appears in print.—*Reprinted from the School Journal.*

• • • •

Have not been up again, but hope to go up to-morrow. Am enjoying myself, and am quite fit.

• • • •

Had a nice flight yesterday with Captain ——. If fine, hope to have another to-morrow.

• • • •

Up this evening. We passed over a field and spotted a B.E. smashed. It had run into a hedge. No one hurt ; machine new.

• • • •

Three flights yesterday, and would have gone " solo " in the afternoon but a pupil smashed the solo machine.

• • • •

Nothing doing ! Nothing done !

• • • •

On Going " Solo."

At last I have gone " solo." On Sunday and Monday two of our machines were smashed by pupils on their first solos and both machines had to be scrapped. In consequence, the pilots have been rather chary about letting us go up alone, and we too have been wondering whether we were fated to follow the example of the others.

At length, however, Captain —— sent up X this evening, and *he* got on all right. So he turned to me suddenly and said, " Well, you'd better go and break your neck now." Thus cheered, I gave my hat as a parting gift to Y, shook hands mournfully all round, and amid lamentations and tears took my seat for the first time in the pilot's seat.

" Contact," etc., and my engine was running. I pointed her out into the aerodrome, and then turned her to the right ; but " taxiing " is almost as tricky as flying, and before I could stop it the machine had turned completely round. However, I got it straight again, and taxied to the starting-place.

A " biff " of my left hand on the throttle, and the engine was going all out. Faster and faster over the ground ; a touch of the controls, and we were off ! The next thing I recollect was passing over a machine on the ground at a height of 200 feet, and then I was at the other end of the aerodrome. This meant a turn ; so down went the nose, then rudder and bank, and round we came in fine style. A touch on the aileron control, and we were level again. Thus I went on for ten minutes, and as Captain —— had told me to do only one circuit and I had done considerably more, I decided to come down.

It was growing dusk, so it was as well that I did. I took her outside the " 'drome," then pointed her in, put the nose down and pulled back the throttle.

The roar of the engine ceased, and the ground loomed nearer. A very slight movement of the controls and we flattened out three feet above the ground and did a gentle landing.

A touch on the throttle, a roar, and I taxied back to the waiting mechanics. "Good landing," sang out one of them, and a moment later some half a dozen pupils were shaking me violently by all the hands they could find and all talking at once in loud voices. "Where's my hat?" I asked, and a crumpled object was handed to me. Then up came Captain ——, very red in the face, and looking exceedingly happy. "Damn good, 'Theta'!" and so it ended. Heaps of love to you both.

• • • •

Went "solo" last Wednesday and shall be surprised if I do so again before Christmas. It is cold and misty, and when not misty it is windy; when it is neither it rains and so on, but mist from the marshes is the worst by far. So sometimes we sits and thinks and cusses and smokes; and sometimes we just sits.

• • • •

Have been up again at last—the first time for a week. Four solo flights to-day. Went up 1,500 feet on the third and stayed up an hour on the fourth, between 900 feet and 1,000 feet. It was lovely flying this evening, but bumpy and airpockety this morning.

• • • •

Taking a Ticket.

"Theta," C. Av. What! At last I am a certificated pilot. As soon as I arrived this morning they sent me up for my ticket, although (as I said) I had never done a right-hand turn alone! I took my ticket in fine style, landing right on the mark each time, while X, who went up first for his, was helping to extricate his machine from a ditch. He finished his tests, however, all right afterwards. When I landed after finishing my eights, my instructor said I could consider myself "some pilot" now. I went up to nearly 2,000 feet this evening for a joy-ride, and stayed up until I got bored and it got dark and began to rain. Well, I have got my ticket without "busting" a wire, so I hope I shall keep it up. Was overwhelmed with congrats. from pupils, etc. I expect I shall be transferred to "B" flight, and get taken up as a passenger so as to learn to fly another type.

• • • •

Up this morning for a joy-ride with Sergeant ——, and got into a fog bank and lost sight of land and sky. Got out of it all right in the end. Rather interesting.

• • • •

To-day was the first nice day for flying for

a week, so the officers and men arranged a football match! All the same I did manage to get a flight; so cheer-o. I had my hair cut yesterday, and a new glass put in my watch. To-day I find my glass cracked, and my hair grown almost as long as before, in the night.

• • • •

Whizzing through the azure blue
In an aeroplane, say you,
Must of sports the nicest be;
So it is, but then, you see,
The only part that can give pain
Is the return to earth again.

Got on splendidly to-day. Went solo all right. This type is much nicer to handle than the other, but you land faster owing to higher speed. This I managed so well that Sergeant —— clapped his hands and said "Very good!"

• • • •

The wind has been blowing,
Ye gods! How it blew!
Stopped bicycles going,
Not one pilot flew.
Up above—eighty-five!
Down below it blew—well—
In this place dead 'n' alive
It is absolute ——!

(Deleted by R.F.C. Censor as not being sufficiently expressive.) However, we attended a very boring lecture, and walked through slud and mush at drill time; so we have not done so badly.

• • • •

Some poets say,
As well they may,
Congenial surroundings
Conduce a lay
With rhythm gay,
And artful phrase compoundings
With helpful muse
To air their views
On Nature's grand aboundings.

E'en so as joy and sorrow
Do in cases bring forth tears
(A simile to borrow),
In this case it now appears
No sunshine sets the muse to work
In humble little me;
'Tis wind, and rain, and fogs that lurk
Drive *me* to poesy.

• • • •

Cleaning wires with emery paper is grand exercise, albeit a trifle monotonous. However, the pay (15*s.* 6*d.* a day) is good. And as we pass we hear the voice of R—— weeping for his pupils (which are not) and will not be comforted.

• • • •

A most wonderful exhibition of flying by Hawker, Raynham, and Marix.

• • • •

First Cross-country Flight.

Did you see your little son to-day emulating the antics of Nature's aerial ornithopters? I left Aerodrome "B" about 10.15 a.m. and went over to S., then I branched off at right angles for W., but as I was about 4,000 feet up I could not pick it out from the other parks and commons, and so, finding myself running into a formidable set of clouds, I "about turned," and after taking my map from my pocket and studying it on my knee for a few minutes, I found out where I was and set out for Aerodrome "A." I found it all right, landed, had a chat with the pupils, borrowed a "bike" and went round to my old rooms, with chocolate for Betty. Teddie, the dog, was overjoyed to see me. . . . I soon got going again and did a few circles over the hospital where Mrs. S. was nursing, climbed to 2,000 feet, and followed the railway to—home! Here I did a circle, trying to cover the houses of as many of my old friends as I could, and then made off at right angles to the railway for Aerodrome "B." Before I left home I dropped four letters with streamers attached—two to you, one to A. C., and one to the Head. Only a few words

inside, so it does not matter whether they are lost or opened by some one else. I have no idea where they fell. I could see Aerodrome "B" eight miles away directly I left you, and landed beautifully in time for lunch. I covered the distance in about seven and a half minutes, having had a ripping morning. I hope you saw me; and if you did, how much money did Dad win betting it was *me*?

The following extracts are from a letter from home which crossed the above in post:

"We saw you. It was all very interesting, and has sent a thrill over the neighbourhood! To ease your mind I may tell you that your letter was duly picked up and delivered within three hours of your visit. . . . The Mater saw an aeroplane passing over earlier in the morning and told me she was sure you had taken Betty her chocolate. Later it became borne in upon me that you were on your way back. I went to the door. Immediately there came the roar of a Gnome-engined biplane, and I yelled 'Here he is.' Up came the Gnome-engine biplane, gaily waving its propeller; then it turned and circled round home. I gurgled 'It is Theta,' seized my handkerchief and waved it violently. Then there fluttered down from the aeroplane some little things

that glittered in the sun as they fell, and we *knew* it was your machine. . . . Then you appeared to go up over the school grounds and so home. I watched you till you were only a speck in the sky, and then turned away. I shall hope when I wake in the morning to have the scene described as it appeared to you from above. Meanwhile our hearty congratulations on your first cross-country flight."

II

SOME EPISODES: AND A "CRASH"

(*Extracts from "Theta's" Private Log-Book*)

Date.	Remarks.
November.	Stalled machine all round aerodrome. Captain L——: "Flying with your tail between your legs: looked d—d dangerous."
,,	Wind screen completely frosted over; had only done few solos; had to take machine to 1,000 feet, lean out, and clean screen.
,,	Same day got in hot air over factory chimneys. Hell!
January.	Second solo on new type. Side-slipped through turning without flying speed. Ghastly sensation. Captain ——: "You would have been killed on any other machine but a ——."

Date.	Remarks.
January.	Another side-slip, but not so bad; pulled her out of it.
,,	First forced landing. Connecting rod broke, and inlet valve went. Machine ought to have caught fire. Was two miles from the 'drome. Just got in, machine vibrating horribly from 2,200 feet down.
February.	Worst day so far flown in. Chucked about like a leaf. No goggles, so could hardly see. Nearly strafed officers' mess. Landing all right, but frightful day.
,,	Engine lost 100 revs. per minute over trees. Had to "bird's-nest"; unpleasant. Lucky engine did not cut out altogether.
,,	Rising over hangars when another aeroplane rose and headed me over tree, and kept too close. Had I not turned quickly at low altitude might have rammed me. Unpleasant.
,,	Cut out just in front of trees at 50 feet. Steep bank; quick right-hand turn; landing close beside trees. O.K.
,,	As passenger; pilot, Lieutenant

Date.	Remarks.
February.	——. Engine missing badly over trees. Attempted to land in small field, but seeing would crash into trees at the other side at 40 m.p.h. pilot put nose up, and with missing engine cleared them by inches, the wheels actually touching the top. Then more tree dodging and steep banks just above ground, landing in aerodrome.
March.	Climbed into clouds and steered by instruments out of sight of earth for practice. Spiralled down.
,,	Climbed 7,000 feet. Glorious view from above of clouds 4,000 feet below me. Most beautiful spectacle I have ever seen. Climbed till engine would go no higher, then stopped engine and did right- and left-hand spirals down, landing without starting engine again.
,,	Started on cross-country to A. Mist very thick; lost my way, and found myself over London [No compass.—*Ed.*]. Turned and discovered Aerodrome "C" below

Date.	Remarks.
March.	me, so landed. Later, when mist cleared, restarted, but a following wind and mist made me overshoot A., and landed in field near D. to find out whereabouts. Engine refused to start, so pegged down machine for the night, and 'phoned H.Q.
,,	Restarted next day when weather cleared up, but all landmarks covered by snow. Landed in field again, but decided to go on. So restarted, and again lost my way. Circled over town and railway, but could not decide what they were, and could not find a landing-ground. Eventually I found one and landed, just stopping in time at the other end. Kept engine ticking over, and was told was four miles from A. Restarted, clearing a large tree by one foot ; saw blizzard coming up; had no time to land, so headed into it and flew for twenty minutes at 200 feet altitude unable to see either instruments or ground. Wind and storm increased in violence ; was frequently blown

Date.	Remarks.
March.	up on to one wing tip, the machine side-slipping once to within a few feet of the ground, and just recovering in time for me to clear a house. Driving snow prevented machine from climbing and nearly drove it to earth. When a lull came and I saw a clear place beneath, I promptly circled round, clearing semi-invisible trees by a matter of inches (I was told). Finally landed well, and was running along the ground when a fence dividing the field in two loomed up a few yards ahead. Elevated, and the nose cleared it, but the tail skid did not, and caught the fence, bringing the machine down on its nose with a crash, and turning it over. My head went through the top plane, and I remained suspended upside down by my safety belt.
,,	Propeller smashes in mid-air.
,,	Tested new-rigged machine which had not been flown since it was smashed. Weather very bad for flying, much less testing a reconstructed machine. Did not

Date.	Remarks.
March.	seem to answer well to the controls and flew left wing down. Landed machine successfully and reported on it.[1]

[1] In his private Log Book "Theta" apportions to the various "episodes" a figure showing the probable value of each narrow escape. From this it appears that he reckoned he ought to have lost his life fifteen and a half times!

III

FROM PASSENGER TO PILOT

THE following notes from "Theta's" Diary show the progress from novice (with accompanying pilot) to certificated aviator (solo):

Height.	Course.	Remarks.
350 ft.	Circuits of Aerodrome	Calm and even; dusk; rested hands on controls.
1,000 ft.	Round Aerodrome	Smooth; dusk; felt controls.
1,000 ft.	Aerodrome and neighbourhood	Had control a little time, and did left-hand turn.
900 ft.	Aerodrome	Controlled along straights.
800–1,000 ft.	Aerodrome with occasional turns outside	Bumpy. Had control along straights for some time. Did several left-hand turns, and one complete turn right round.
600–700 ft.	Aerodrome	Did circuits, turns, and one landing.
600 ft.	Aerodrome	Bumpy; so did not get much control.
500 ft.	Aerodrome	Controlled circuits, and two landings.
600 ft.	Aerodrome	Entire control; recovery from bank not quite quick enough. One landing.
400 ft.	Aerodrome	Better; two landings.
300 ft.	Aerodrome	Two landings; taxi and take off. Told to go solo in afternoon.

Height.	Course.	Remarks.
300 ft.	Aerodrome	Two good landings; one bad. Too bumpy for solo.
400 ft.	Aerodrome	Bumpy; one landing.
300 ft.	Aerodrome	One landing; bumpy.
300 ft.	Aerodrome	Entire control, and then sent solo.
350 ft.	Aerodrome	First solo; a few circuits and smooth landing.
500 ft.	Aerodrome	All right.
800 ft.	Aerodrome	Bumpy; landed with engine ticking over too fast.
1,500 ft.	Aerodrome	Climbed too steeply and nosed down too much on turns. Very bumpy.
700–1,000 ft.	Aerodrome	Calm; flew for half an hour solo; landing fairly good. Climbed at better angle and turns slightly better.
500 ft.	Figure eights in 'drome	Did first part for ticket successfully, and landed right on T.
500 ft.	Eights in 'drome	Did second part of ticket right again, landing within few yards of T.
580 ft.	One wide circuit with engine switched off	Completed tests for R.A.C. Certificate.
1,600 ft.	Aerodrome	Joy-ride; landed with too much engine.

BOOK II

ON ACTIVE SERVICE

R.F.C. ALPHABET

A stands for Archie, the Huns' greatest pride,
B for B.E., our biplane they deride.
C for the " Crash " when by " A " [1] " B " gets hit,
D for the Dive before " C " ends the flit.
E is for Engine, which sometimes goes dud,
F is Cold Feet, as you wait for the thud.
G is the Gun that you keep on the 'plane,
H as per " trig " [2] is the height you attain.
I am the Infant who flies a 2C,[3]
J the Joy-stick on most 'buses you see.
K is the Kick that you get from a gun,
L a forced Landing, too oft to be done.
M for Mechanic ; in France most are " firsts," [4]
N for the Noise that A makes when it bursts.
O which is oil, stops the seizing of E,
P Petrol used by the E of the B.
Q is the Quiet one gets on a glide,
R the Revolver you keep by your side.
S is for Side-slip, some Shot, or a Stunt,
T is the Thrill of a big Fokker hunt.
U Under-carriage, first to go in a smash,
V a V.P. [5] oft precedeth a crash.
W the Wireless, for directing big guns,
X Y Z I don't want, so I'll give to the Huns.

[1] Archie = Anti-aircraft.
[2] Trig = Trigonometry.
[3] 2C = B.E.2C.
[4] Firsts = 1st Air Mechanics.
[5] V.P. = *Vol Plané.*

I

THE OPENING MOVEMENTS

I AM here at last. Where that is, however, I can't tell you. . . . We had a good journey, but while I was snoozing the carriage door—which must have been carelessly shut by one of our men—opened, and one of my field boots departed. I had taken them off so as to sleep better. I told a police corporal at the next station, and he is trying to get it. I had to put on puttees and boots, and pack the odd field boot. . . . You would hardly believe we were on Active Service here, although we are, of course, within hearing of the big guns. There is a stream near by where we can bathe. We have sleeping-huts fitted with electric light, nice beds, a good mess, and a passable aerodrome. The fellows all seem nice, too. I have met three of our squadron before.

"Somewhere."

• • • •

I have been up several times, but have not

had a job yet. I have been learning the district, and how to land and rise on cinder paths ten feet wide. The ground here is rather rough, and it speaks well for our under-carriages that they stand up to it so well. A good landing is a bounce of about twenty feet into the air, and a diminuendo of bounces, like a grasshopper—until you pull up. A fairly bad landing is a bounce of fifty feet and diminuendo. Every one here is cheerful, and thinks flying is a gentleman's game, and infinitely better than the trenches; when your work is over for the day, there is no more anxiety until your next turn comes round, for you can read and sleep out of range of the enemy's guns. What a pity the whole war could not be conducted like that, both sides out of range of each other's guns all the time!

One of our more cheerful optimists feels sure the war will end in the next four or five years.

My field boot has turned up, much to my surprise. It was forwarded on to me by our local Railway Transport Officer.

We are having quite a good time in our squadron and are rejoicing in bad weather. Our messing bill is reasonable, and cigarettes and tobacco are very cheap; so are matches.

• • • •

I have just been over to get some practice

with the Lewis gun. They are rather amusing toys, for you get rid of 100 shots in ten seconds, as you are probably aware. . . .

I took up a mechanic who is a good gunner, to act as an escort to one of our men who was going photographing. The corporal was awfully amusing. He was always getting up and turning round, or kneeling on his seat looking at me and signalling to me. I thought several times he was going to get out and walk along the planes. The flight was quite uneventful. Next time I write I hope to be able to tell you what the trenches are like; at present, owing to low clouds and bad weather, I haven't been able to look at them.

• • • •

Map Study.

On Thursday I went up with an officer observer on a patrol, to look for Huns and gun flashes, etc. We could not see anything above 3,000 feet; so we came down to 2,500 feet and flew up and down the lines—well on this side, though—for a couple of hours. I thus got a splendid view of the trenches on both sides for miles, and it was awfully interesting to see the fields in some places behind our lines, originally green pasture land, now almost blotted out with shell holes and mine craters.

There has been a craze here for gardening

recently, and people are sowing seeds sent over from England, and building rockeries and what not. A counter-craze of dug-out digging was started by our C.O. so as to provide a place of retreat if over-enthusiastic Huns come over some day to bomb us. The dug-out was almost finished when the rain came and converted it into a swimming-bath. The dug-out mania has now ceased.

Thanks for your advice about studying maps. If I carried it out as you suggest in all my spare time, this is something like what my diary would have been for the past week :

3.30 a.m.	Wakened for early patrol work. Weather is dud, so study maps until :
8.30 a.m.	Breakfast. Raining, so return to room to study maps.
12.30 p.m.	Snatch ten minutes for lunch, and get back to maps.
4.30 p.m.	Have some tea, having violent argument meanwhile on contoured and uncontoured maps. More study.
8 p.m.	Break off map study for dinner ; then go to bed and study maps till " lights out."
	Here ends another derned dull day.

Still I quite understand what prompted your advice. If one does get lost, however, one has only to fly west for a few minutes till one crosses the lines, and then inquire, as we never go far over the lines unless escorted.

I have been up two mornings running at 3.30 for work, but the weather has been "dud." We do not always get early work, of course; we take it in turns.

I was up over the lines yesterday about 4,000 feet and they put up a few Archies at me. They were rather close, so I zigzagged to a cooler spot.

• • • •

A Forced Landing.

This morning we were up at half-past two o'clock. We got up 8,000 feet, and awaited the signal to proceed from our leading machine; but the clouds below us completely blotted out the ground, so we were signalled to descend. When I had dived through the clouds at 5,000 feet, I discovered to my surprise what appeared to be another layer of clouds down below, and no sign of the ground at all. I came lower and lower with my eyes glued on the altimeter, and still no sign of the ground. Finally I went through the clouds until I was very low, and then suddenly I saw a row of trees in front of me, pulled her up, cleared

them, and was lost in the fog or clouds again. I decided that that place was not good enough, and, not knowing where I was, I flew west by my compass for about a quarter of an hour and came down very low again. This time we had more success, and could occasionally see patches of ground fairly well from about twice the height of a small tree. We cruised around till we spotted a field, and, after a good examination of it, landed all right, and found on inquiry, to our great relief, that we were in France. The observer-officer and I shook hands when we landed. We returned later in the day when the weather cleared up. I am not the only one who had a forced landing, but we all came out all right, I believe.

I was getting some well-earned sleep this afternoon when there came a knock at the door of my hut, and R. H. W. walked in. He is not far from me and so motor-cycled over. He stopped to tea, and I showed him round.

We are very hard up for games, so I want you to send me a Ping-Pong set—wooden or cork bats, and a goodly supply of balls.

• • • •

Archies.

(*To B.C.*) I have been putting off writing to you till I can tell you how I like German Archies. Well, I can tell you now; that is, I can tell you how I don't

like them if you promise not to show any one else this letter. Still, perhaps I'd better not; you are such a good little boy and have only just left school; perhaps one day when you are grown up I'll tell you my opinion of Archie.

Yesterday I was some miles across the line with my observer, as an escort to another machine, and was Archied like the—er—dickens, shells bursting all round and some directly under me. Why the machine wasn't riddled I don't know. I was nearly 10,000 feet up too. The Archies burst, leaving black puffs of smoke in the air, so that the gunners could see the result. Those puffs were all over the sky. Talk about dodge! Banking both ways at once! 'Orrible. What's more, I had to stay over them, dodging about until the other machine chose to come back or finished directing the shooting. Both W. and J. who came here with me got holes in their planes from Archie the day before yesterday, and W. had a scrap with a Fokker yesterday and got thirty holes through his plane about three feet from his seat. The Fokker approached to within twenty-five feet. W. had a mechanic with him, and he fired a drum of ammunition at it, and the Fokker dived for the ground. So the pilot was either wounded or—well, they don't know how the machine landed, but are hoping to hear from the people

in the trenches. The funny part is that the Fokker attacked as usual by diving from behind, and W.'s observer turned round and fired kneeling on the seat ; but W. never saw the Fokker once during the whole fight or after. W. had his main spar of one wing shot away, and several bracing wires, etc., so he had a lucky escape.

My latest adventure is that my engine suddenly stopped dead when I was a mile over the German lines. My top tank petrol gauge was broken, and was registering twelve gallons when it was really empty. I dropped 1,000 feet before I could pump up the petrol from the lower tank to the top, and was being Archied, too ; but I could have got back to our side easily even if the engine had refused to start, though it would have been unpleasant to cross the lines at a low altitude. I have had the petrol gauge put right now. Incidentally, not knowing how much petrol you have is rather awkward, as I landed with less than two gallons at the end of that flight ; that is ten minutes' petrol.

• • • •

Aged 19.

It is rather strange having a birthday away from home, but the letter and parcels I got to-day made it all seem like old times. . . . I have done some night

flying here, and when I was up 2,000 feet I could see flares and lights over in Hunland. I stayed up some time, and finally by a colossal fluke did the best landing I have ever done at the Aerodrome.

. . . .

A Concert.

I went to a concert at Wing Headquarters the other evening; it wasn't at all bad. "The Foglifters" had really quite good voices, and some of the turns were excellent. One made up as a splendid girl. The programme may interest you :

IN THE FIELD

Lieut. —— presents, by kind permission of Lieut.-Colonel ——, his renowned Vaudeville entertainment,

THE "FOG-LIFTERS."

(They are thoroughly disinfected before each performance.)

PROGRAMME

PART I

1. The Fog-lifters introduce themselves.
2. C—— tries—but can't.
3. B—— sings a Warwickshire song in Yorkshire brogue.
4. Six-foot picks his mark.
5. B—— on his experiences in the Marines.
6. C—— relates his visit to Hastings.

7. T—— on Acrobatic Eyes.
8. The Second-in-Command ties himself in a knot.
9. Six-foot warns the unwary.
10. The Fog-lifters, feeling dry, retire at this point for a drink, and leave you to the tender mercies of H——. "Watch your watch and chain yourself to your seat."

Part II

11. T—— thinks of leave.
12. The "Boss" makes a bid for the biscuit.
13. B—— and his Favourite Topic.
14. Rather a Fagging Turn.
15. B—— in Love.
16. T—— endeavours to sing a Sentimental Song.
17. Six-foot shows B—— how it's done.
18. The Second-in-Command excels 'iself.
19. B——'s memories of the Spanish Armada.
20. Six-foot and C—— have a Serious Relapse.

The Beginning of the End.

The King.

II

INCREASING THE PACE

ONLY time for a few lines before the post goes. I was flying at a quarter to three o'clock this morning. I was orderly pilot, and a Hun was reported in the neighbourhood. I went to bed after two hours' flying and was knocked up again, and spent another couple of hours in the air—all this before I had anything to eat or drink. Luckily I was not at all hungry or thirsty. The Hun I was chasing (or rather looking for) on my second patrol was brought down a few miles from our aerodrome by a French aviator. The pilot and observer were killed. Neither my observer nor I saw anything at all of the fight, as we were patrolling further down the line. You bet I was fed up when we landed. The smash was brought to our place and taken away by the French. The machine seemed essentially German—very solid and thick, weight no object.

French Aviator's Bag.

The French aviators were very nice. I had a chat with them. The rumours at the aerodrome were various—one that I was brought down ; another that I had brought down a Hun ; and a third that a French aviator and I had had a scrap !

. . . .

The Enemy in our Midst.

Here is a true story. There was some night flying at one of our aerodromes the other day, and a machine came over and fired a coloured light asking " Can I come down ? " The people on the ground fired one in reply meaning " Yes," and a completely equipped German biplane landed and a guttural German voice was heard shouting for mechanics. He got them all right, but they were R.F.C. and not German mechanics. The coincidence of the signals was extraordinary. The machine—it was an Aviatik—was in perfect order, and has since been flown and tested by the R.F.C. It was wonderfully kind of them to plank their machine down in that aerodrome, and the surprise on both sides must have been extremely comical to watch when the Hun discovered it was an English 'drome, and the mechanics discovered it was a Hun pilot.

I know that this is Sunday, as we have had a lot of work to do. I have just come down from my job. I went up at 12.30 and landed at 3.40. Not a bad flight? I was up and down the lines patrolling most of the time. Our escort lost us soon after leaving the 'drome, but it didn't matter. I got Archied two or three times, but nothing really annoying. They are very clever with those guns. For instance, when I was a mile and a half or perhaps less on our side of the lines they fired Archie on the French side of me, hoping I would turn away from it and so get within better range. They generally let you cross the lines in peace, so as to entice you over as far as possible, and then let you have it hot and strong all the way back. . . .

I have just been to look at the machine. Apparently one of those Archies got nearer than I thought, for a piece of shrapnel has made a 6-inch hole in the tail plane. The shrapnel must have been spent, because it has only pierced the bottom surface of the tail, and has not penetrated the top. I was rather pleased when I found that, as it is something to say that your machine has been hit by Archie.

The ping-pong set has arrived.

. . . .

I'll let you know right enough when I want any more garments. Our linen goes off to be washed at any old time, as there are plenty of laundries near here—an old woman, an old wooden bat, and a smooth worn stone by a dirty stream. The stuff comes back wonderfully clean, however.

Don't you worry about my food while night flying. I get that all right; it was a very 'ceptional case the other day. If we have an early stunt we always get hot cocoa and bread-and-butter. But you see, I was orderly pilot that day, and the Huns weren't polite enough to ring me up the night before and tell me what time they were coming; and so I had to move rather more quickly when they did come. I can get chocolates and biscuits at the Canteen here.

This is what you will call another "restful" letter because I have had no flying yesterday or to-day. We rather like bad weather here when it is sufficiently bad.

Dunno why the other squadron was "mentioned" in despatches. They have about seven of our chaps there—perhaps that's why—or perhaps the General lost some money at bridge to the C.O., or perhaps they drew lots for it.

. . . .

I had some ping-pong to-day—quite a relaxation after the job I did this morning. I went out with an observer on a howitzer shoot, an officer in this case. We went over to the lines, arriving there about 11.15 a.m. and "rang up" the battery. All being well, we ploughed over the lines to have a look at the target in Hunland. The battery then fired, and the observer watched for the burst and wirelessed back the correction. Each shot fired meant a journey over the lines, and each time we went over the Huns got madder and madder, and loosed off "Archie" at us in bucketsful.

"Hot Air Stuff."

Archie to right of us,
Archie to left of us, etc.

We were fairly plastered in Archie. Each time I crossed the lines I did so at a different altitude. The first five times I climbed higher each time to throw the range out, and the next five times I came down a bit each time. The last five times I was so fed up with their dud shooting that I went across at whatever altitude I happened to be at, and that probably upset 'em more than ever! At any rate they fired about 600 shells at us in the course of that "shoot," allowing roughly forty shells per crossing (at least) and fifteen crossings, and the only damage they did was

to put a small hole through my top plane. My, they must have been disgusted![1]

The " strafe " took place between 5,000 feet and 6,000 feet altitude. The Archies got so near sometimes that we went through the smoke from the shell. Of course it would never do to go on flying a straight course; it is a case of dodge, twist, turn, and dive at odd and unexpected moments, and when it gets really too hot, run away and come back at a different altitude.

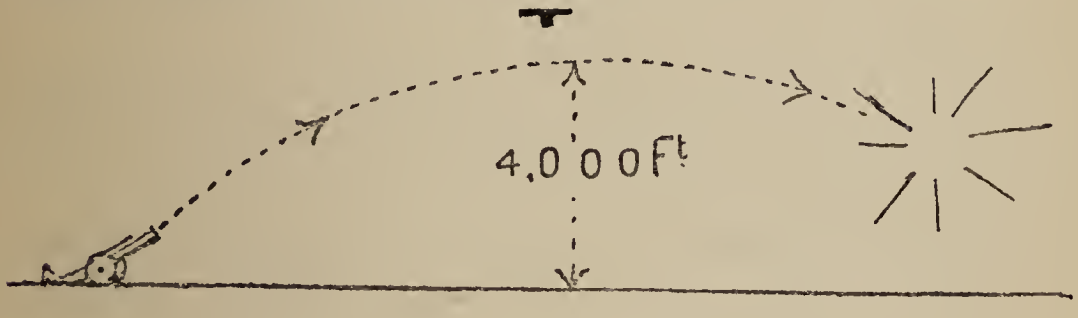
• • • •

A Big " Strafe."

The Bosches started a big " strafe " yesterday, and so kept us all busy on counter battery work; that is, spotting the flashes of the " hun-guns," and wirelessing down their positions to the artillery, who either fire at them or note their positions for a future occasion. With all the German guns going, the woods behind the lines were a blaze of flashes, and we sent down as many in the afternoon as the battery had got in the previous six weeks. The artillery were naturally rather bucked. It was a wonderful sight seeing all the shells

[1] In his private log book " Theta " sets out the cost of petrol expended by him on a non-eventful flight, and the cost to the Huns of the Archies fired at him, drawing out a balance of cash profit or loss to the R.F.C.

bursting along the miles of trenches, and the huge white spreading gas shells at intervals. One could hear the bang of our big guns when they fired salvos from under us, and at times we got bumps from the shells passing near us in the air. "Shell bumps" are fairly common, and I have had them before. I don't know how near the shells pass, but moving at that speed they would affect the air for a long way round. I felt them at 5,000 feet once. They were not being shot at us, but shells which pass through to Hunland, so :



• • • •

We got a wireless report here of a naval battle and not a cheery one at that. We are all waiting to see what the papers will have to say about it to-morrow. . . . Later : The C.O. has just been on the 'phone about the naval battle, and we are relieved to hear that it was not so bad as we had heard at first, or rather that the German losses were not so few as we were told.

I must stop, as I have some letters to

censor. "Hoping this finds you as it leaves me, in the pink."

• • • •

We have had two or three days of rest, as the weather has been too bad for flying. . . . The naval battle was not a defeat after all, and it seems a case of "as you were" in France ; so we just sit here and play ping-pong and wait for the Army to win the war.

• • • •

We have just had the papers with the news of the loss of Kitchener. We got the story by wireless a couple of days ago, but could not believe it until we saw it actually in print. It is a big blow, though probably morally more than in any other way. . . .

Bad news has come through from the wing. Our ten days' leave will in future be cut down to seven days from time of leaving here ; that means five clear days in England. I only know this, that I shall be pleased to have leave in England, however short it is. It is a case of "so near and yet so far." An hour and a half or two hours' flying on a clear day would land me at home for tea—always providing I did not miss my way. But we don't have such a bad time here on the whole, and I am

perfectly frank with you in my letters. On carefully analysing my feelings, I believe I am actually enjoying the life, for we certainly do have the best time of any branch of the Army when our job is over.

• • • •

Looping the Loop.

I had a job in the morning yesterday. A slight bombardment was on, and the C.O. sent me up to stop it. It was a beastly day—rain stings at seventy miles an hour—and it was cloudy and misty. We stayed a couple of hours, got a few Archies and came home.

The afternoon cleared up, and my Flight Commander suggested I should go up and practise with a camera and some old plates. So up I went, and, with the camera tied on very securely in case I " accidentally " turned upside down, beetled off to a spot behind the lines where I played a delightful game of " make-believe." Fixing on an innocent little farmhouse as my objective, I dodged imaginary Archies on my way to it, and, regardless of the laws of aerial navigation, put my machine in such postures that the farmhouse was sighted by the camera.

I tried a dozen or so shots at it, and then, as I had reached a height of 6,000 feet, I thought I would try to do my first loop. I shoved the

nose down 70—80—90—100 miles per hour. The pitot tube did not register any higher; the liquid went out at the top. Then, when at a speed of approximately a hundred and twenty miles an hour, I pulled the "joy-stick" back into my tummy, and up went the nose—up—up—and there I was, upside down, gazing at the sky. Gee, how slowly she seems to be going! Ah!! she's over at last. The white blank overhead changes to a black mass of earth rising up at me, and the nose dive part is over too, and a final sweep brings me level.

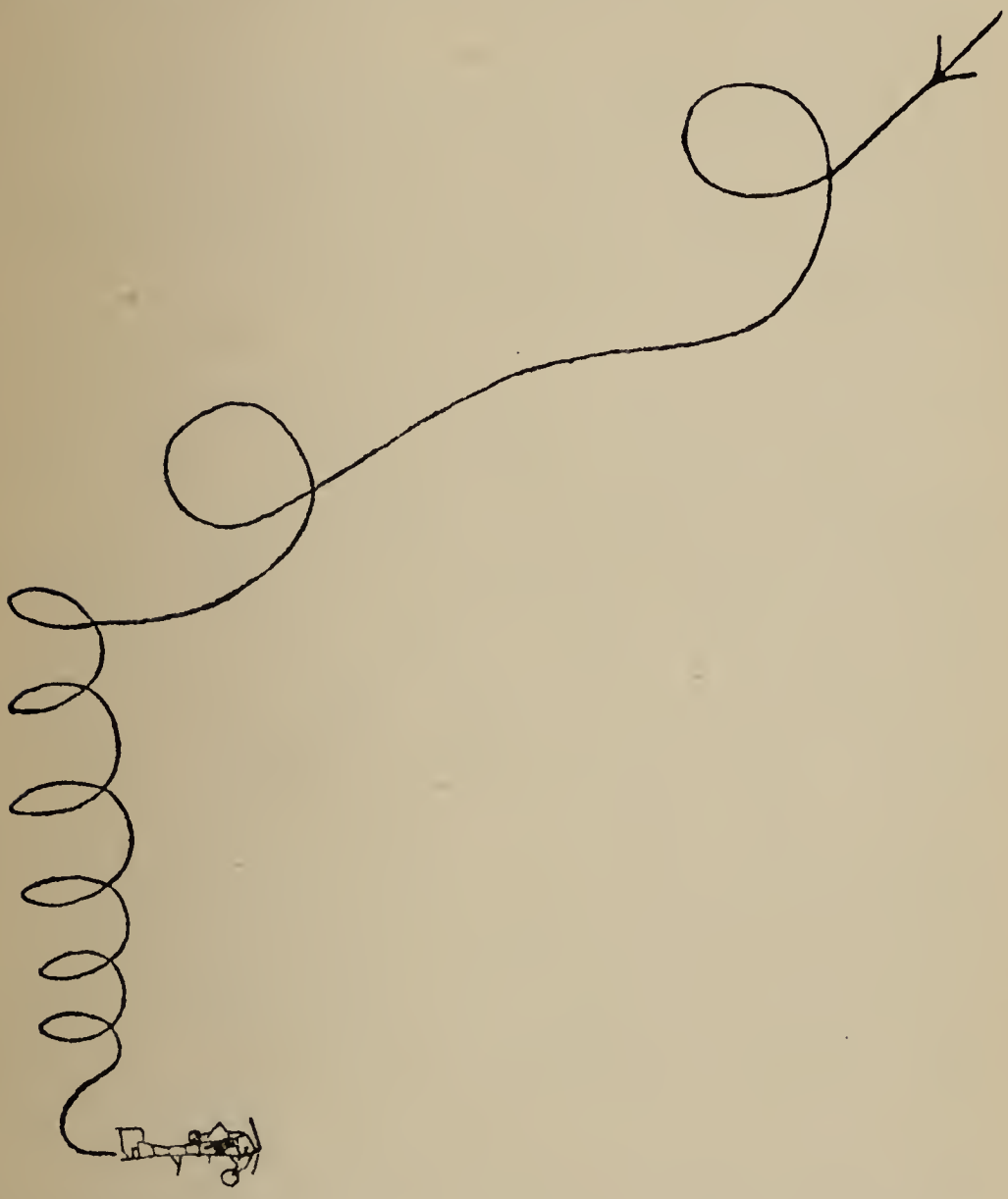
I glanced at the altimeter. I had lost 400 feet.

Cheer-o! Now I'll write home and tell them. No, I *must* do another. If I did only one they would think I had funked it after the first shot.

Down goes the nose, then up—up—and slower—slower. By Jove, she's going to stick at the top of the loop this time. Too slow; centrifugal force is not great enough. My feet seem to lose their contact with the floor.

I grip the "joy-stick" fiercely with both hands. Ah! She's over. Now the rush down, and then level once more. Now I'll get off to the aerodrome and show them how to do it.

I did a couple more quite close to the aerodrome—beauties ; and then came down in a steep spiral. They were all at a height of



6,000 feet, and I only lost 400 feet each time. Four good loops at the first time of attempting a loop isn't bad considering I had never even looped as a passenger. Strangely enough, I

wasn't half so excited as I expected to be, and once accomplished, the feat seemed easy and not out of the ordinary. But to set your minds at rest I do not intend to go in for stunting.

I am quite bucked, though, at having done it, and it was a curious sensation, to say the least. I have been heartily congratulated: they were "d—d good loops!"

• • • •

Thanks ever so much for the pastries and the cake. They were ripping. But really, though, you mustn't trouble so much over me in the food line, for we have to pinch ourselves and tell each other "There is a war on" sometimes when we get some unusual delicacies. By the same post I got a pound of lovely nut chocolate from S. We had a tremendous scrap in the Mess over it when I discovered what it was, and it ended up with the box of chocolate on the floor, with me on top of it, and five people on top of me. When they discovered that the more people there were on top of me the farther off became the chocolate, they got up, and I handed it round in the usual civilised manner. It was great fun, though, and the chocolate being in a tin did not suffer.

We had a visit from Ian Hay's friend to-day,

if you recall a certain incident in the trenches. He recently got the Military Cross.[1]

. . . .

One of the difficulties I have to contend with here is finding out the correct day and date. Days here are all one to us, and it has even sometimes to be put to the vote.

Yesterday I spent four and a half hours in my machine! Not all in the air, though. I took up fifteen different passengers, and gave them all a spiral. They were sent over to see what signalling on the ground looks like from a 'plane. I don't think any of them had been up before. At Hendon I should have made between £30 and £40 for that.

As I was going out of the aerodrome I flew over a passing car and we waved merrily to each other. Then I chased the car, slowed my engine and dived at it, and a little later flew after it again. The driver must have been watching me too closely, for he went into the ditch. My passenger was awfully bucked about it.

I suppose you know we have adopted the new time now. It only alters the hour of our meals, however; our work goes on according to the light and the weather.

Cricket is the great "stunt" here in the

[1] The Prince of Wales.

afternoon and Rugby in the evenings. The mornings are spent in repairing the damage of overnight caused by the Rugger. All this, of course, provided the little incidentals of flying, and so on, do not interfere to excess. The batsman is out-numbered by fielders in the proportion of fifteen to one, and for his further annoyance he may not smite the ball more than quite a moderate distance or it counts as out. Still, the game provides much amusement, and as the batsman generally ignores the boundary rule, and smites at every ball on the principle of a short life and a gay one, it is also conducive to short innings.

. . . .

Night Flying.

I had another twenty minutes' night flying a couple of nights ago, and did a good landing. It was almost pitch dark, as there was a long row of clouds at 2,000 feet which hid the moon. We had flares out, and a searchlight lighting up the track; but from the moment you start moving you go out into inky darkness, flying on, seeing nothing till the altimeter tells you that you are high enough to turn. Then round, and the twinkling lights of the Aerodrome beneath. Higher, and gradually, as you become accustomed to the dark, you pick out a road here and a clump of trees there,

till finally the picture is complete. At length, you throttle down the engine and glide—keeping a watchful eye on the altimeter, aerodrome, and air speed indicator. When about 400 feet up you open out your engine again, and fly in towards the aerodrome, stopping your engine just outside. Then you glide down and land alongside the flares.

As I write, I hear a lively bugle band in the distance on the march. More troops going up to the trenches, I suppose. Our gramophone still plays on, our gardens and flower-beds are blooming, and all is well.

• • • •

Photos.

To-day I went up to take photos, and went over the lines four times, carefully sighting the required trenches, and taking eighteen photos. I spent nearly two and a half hours in the air, and when I got back I found the string that worked the shutter had broken after my third photo, and the rest had not come out. It was disappointing, because my last three journeys over the lines need not have been made, and incidentally it would have saved getting a hole through one of my planes.

J. saw a scrap in the air to-day in which one of our machines was brought down. He was too far off to help. The report came in

first that it was my 'bus which was down, but neither I nor my escort machine saw the fight, which must have been some distance off.

. . . .

Hide and Seek.

All goes well, and I have finished my job for to-day (a three hours' patrol) without seeing a Hun or getting an Archie. Two of us went up and F had streamers on his wings ; he was going to direct the flight, and I was to follow him. It was very cloudy, and F being in a skittish mood played hide-and-seek round them. This was good fun for the first hour, but after that it became boring. Once, when I was following him a short distance behind, he ran slap into the middle of a huge cloud. I said to myself, " If you think I am going to follow you there you're jolly well mistaken " ; so I waited outside the cloud, and was gratified to see him come out at the bottom in a vertical bank, about 500 feet directly below me. It turned out that he had been pumping up the pressure in his petrol tank, roaring with laughter as his passenger gave a little jump at every pumpful, for the passenger sits on one of the large petrol tanks, which swells or " unkinks " itself as you pump, and to his disgust he had run slap into the cloud without seeing it. It was a wonderful sight among

the clouds, and to see the other aeroplane dodging in and out of grottos, canyons, and tunnels, poking its nose here and there, sometimes worrying a zigzag course through a maze of cloudlets, and sometimes turning back from an impenetrable part with a vertical bank, outlining the machine sharply against the cloud. Finally we came down to a height of 5,000 feet, and there, just by the lines, we had a sham battle for the amusement of the Tommies in the trenches.

• • • •

"I have nothink to write about this time. I got a letter from Bert the other day, he's out in France, and old George's group is called up too. I wonder when those Saterday nites with them will cum back, they were times. Then that supper with me and him at Eliza's after—my! Everyone thinks as how the war will be over with luck in a few years' time. 'As Pa got that job or is he still at the 'Green Man'? Well hoping this finds you as it leaves me at present, in the pink. I wish you'd send our cook the resepe for them cooked chips you used ter do on Saterday nites. Give my love to Rose."

No, I'm still sane—merely a temporary lapse owing to an overdose of censoring. The squadron yesterday, noticing that I was

orderly officer, decided to give me a run for my money, and wrote millions of letters.

My Flight Commander—one of the finest fellows I have ever met—is busy cooking tobacco with E. in a tin by means of a spirit lamp! They are trying to determine its "flash point," and I have sent word round to the M.O. to stand by with stretchers.

I was up with K. yesterday, strafing some trenches. We started at 3,000 feet and the clouds descended lower and lower till we ended up at a height of 1,200 feet over a well-known town, where it became too wet and too hot at the same time for our job. To-day the clouds are crawling about just over the ground, so there is nothing doing.

Our food here is English right enough. We get French bread as well, and it is generally preferred to ration bread. The gardens here have flowers—planted out mostly—pansies, nasturtiums, etc. I suggested that asparagus would be rather a good thing to plant, but the idea didn't seem to catch on!

There is no reason whatever to be worried about not receiving letters. If there is ever a move either way it would not affect the R.F.C. to any great extent. It couldn't improve German Archie shooting or anything of that sort. No fighting on the ground can reach us, and in a big bombardment it only

means that we are kept fairly busy directing the fire of our batteries, etc.

• • • •

"Missing."

Sorry I shan't be able to write you to-day except this rough note written in my biplane. I have finished my job, and am writing in the hope of catching the post. There is bad news to-day. My pal B., who was on a bombing stunt this morning, has not returned, so I am afraid he may have landed in Hunland. I am just doing a long glide down to the aerodrome; my passenger has asked me not to spiral down as he has got a bad head. I enclose his note. His writing is better than mine, as he has written on a soft pad. (Enclosure :—"Got a rotten head, so go steady, will you?")

• • • •

I've got a top-hole souvenir now. It is a machine-gun bullet which my rigger found in my fuselage—that is to say, the aeroplane fuselage. It is bent "some," as it smote something rather hard—a bomb.

I went up to take some special photos for the C.O. to-day, but the weather was very bad, and the sky as smothered in clouds as I was in Archie, and that is saying a good deal. It took me three trips over the line to get five

photos. Four came out, including on them corners of clouds I was dodging. The Huns got our range to a nicety, but there was not a scratch on the machine. One Archie burst just in front of us, and I looked up to see the corporal I had as passenger disappear in the smoke as we actually went through it. It was like going through a tiny cloud. I have heard and seen plenty of Archie before, but never before *smelt* it. The C.O. was rather pleased, though only one photo was really of any use.

The engine in my machine has put up a record for the squadron. It did over a hundred and ten hours' running without being touched or even having the sparking plugs changed. It was still going strong when we changed it and put a new one in. I have tested the new one and flown with it, and it is very good.

We are kept well up-to-date with the London theatre news by the fellows who come back from leave. They also bring the records of them back for the gramophone, and now the camp resounds with music from "The Bing Boys are Here" and "Mr. Manhattan."

To people who think this branch of the Service the most dangerous, you can say I'd sooner be here than in the trenches these days, and I think the opinion of the whole corps is the same.

• • • •

Pancaking in a Wheat Field.

I ran out of petrol a quarter of a mile from the aerodrome, and had to land in a field of wheat about five feet high. I had been up three hours and twenty minutes non-stop when my petrol ran out, and the gauge still showed three gallons in the tank, though it was bone dry. I was 700 feet up and had to make up my mind where I was going to land in about four seconds. I brought her down, and pancaked her beautifully into the field about three yards from a road. It is jolly hard to land in wheat without turning over, but I did it without hurting the machine at all; in fact J. flew it that evening on a night stunt. We wheeled it from the field along the road back to the aerodrome inside half an hour. My passenger said he enjoyed the flight more than any other he had had!

At the present moment there is *some* storm on. J. is playing the violin not two yards from me, and I cannot hear a single note except during lulls. Perhaps it is just as well.

One of our squadron was out on a stunt the other day. Next day the 'phone was continually on the go, and there was so much "hot air" in the office that it was dangerous to fly over on account of the bumps.

Several of us have got special leave to go to a flicker show some way off, and a tender is coming in a few minutes. I am very fit, and we are all a very happy party. I am sitting on my bed, in my little hut about 8 feet by 6 feet. It is really quite snug. Washstand, etc., and shelves and books *and* boots and clothes. Diabolo (home made) is the latest craze here! Here comes the tender, so I must catch the post first.

• • • •

I was up on photos to-day. I hope and expect these are the last for a while. I had quite a job getting them owing to clouds. I flew about behind the German lines for over an hour before I could get a single photo, owing to there being no holes in the clouds. I got practically no Archie, and got the photos.

I went to the flicker show the other day and it was quite good. A splendid divisional band, a Charlie Chaplin film, and tea, *and patisserie!* Ah!

I think Gillespie's book (*Letters from Flanders*) most interesting. I have only dipped into it here and there at present, but am going to read it through. Send some more as soon as you like.

• • • •

Blessed if I know what to write about. I did the three-hour patrol yesterday, but it was very cold and cloudy and no Huns ventured out.

An Exciting Landing.

A visitor landed at our 'drome from night bombing and a bomb blew his machine up on landing. He calmly got out of the scrap-heap and walked away. It was a miraculous escape, and most of our people who were asleep thought it was a Hun bombing us. The engine was still running on the ground, and the C.O. stopped it by using a fire extinguisher in the air intake—a jolly clever and plucky thing to do, as there were gallons of petrol all around, and, for all he knew, more bombs.

There is a darling puppy here belonging to one of the men, and I go round and have a chat with it every morning when I inspect my transport. It is a jolly little thing, and quite looks forward to my visits.

• • • •

At the Base was a Censor,
He chopped up my letter;
Thus he was a base Censor,
Or why didn't he let her
Go by? Yet he'd some sense or
News even better
You'd get in my letter.

• • • •

Dual Control.

I am at present flying a machine fitted with dual control. A couple of days ago I went up to test it and E. came with me. We trotted round the country very low and stunted gently over neighbouring villages. You can easily tell when people are watching you, as in looking up the black blob of the hat changes to the white blob of the face. We went up again yesterday, and when I had taken the machine to 2,000 feet or so, I signalled E., and he fitted in his control lever and took charge. I then had a pleasant little snooze of twenty minutes or so, waking up now and then to give my lever a pat in the required direction when he did not get the machine level quickly enough after turning, or something like that. He did jolly well, turning the machine splendidly sometimes. Then, when it was just about a quarter of an hour before dinner time he took out his lever, and I brought the machine down in the most gorgeous spiral I have ever done. Absolutely vertical bank on. M. was very amusing afterwards. "Quite a good spiral that," he said patronisingly to E., "for a first attempt."

I was up again this morning for two and a half hours with E. The weather was hopeless; our altitude was often under 2,000 feet by the lines. To relieve the monotony E. flew me

for about half an hour while I observed—the clouds and mist! Finally, we got up a bit higher, and just before it was time to come home did a beautiful spiral quite close to the lines for the benefit of a few thousand Tommies and Huns in the trenches—just to show there was no ill-feeling, you know.

I had just got my letters to-day when I was sent up, so I had to take them with me, and read them in the air on the way to the lines.

• • • •

I took up some chocolate the other day when I was on patrol, and gave some to the observer in the air, and we munched away for some time. He was a sergeant, one of the ancient observers, and he did not know that when I waggled the joy-stick—thus shaking the 'bus from side to side—I wanted him to turn round. I waggled away for about five minutes, and he sat there quite contentedly, thinking to himself (as he afterwards told me) that it was rather a bumpy day. Then I started switch-backing and he endured that, though on what theory I don't know. Finally I nearly had to loop him to persuade him to turn round, and when he did so he had a grin on his face and a sort of "Think-you-can-frighten-me-with-your-stunts-you-g i d d y-kipper" look as well.

The newspaper stories of the firing in France being heard in Ireland, the north of Scotland, and Timbuctoo amuse me greatly. Those people must have "some" ears.

. . . .

I was most frightfully sorry that you hadn't received up to Sunday my letter about the postponement of my leave. It must have been a rotten disappointment, and I raged round the camp until I finally simmered down again. Never mind, it won't be long. . . . Six people have just invaded my 8 feet by 6 feet hut. That is one of the ways superfine Virginias depart this life quickly. Rescued the inkbottle from an untimely death as a billiard ball, the cue a rolled-up map; violent cussin', almost worthy of Mother Guttersnipe caused E. to vamoose and the others buzzed off.

My dear old 'bus (or aeroplane as the authorities insist on its being called)[1] has gone under at last. One new pilot too many was called upon to fly it, and I may be bringing home a new walking-stick! I have not been flying it for a week now, as I have a nice new —er—machine to fly. But E. and I did all our

[1] Reference to a humorously satirical caution against the use of the terms "'bus" or "plane" instead of "aeroplane" or "machine."

"hot-air stuff" on the other 'bus, and I looped it.

. . . .

The splendid news has come through that my pal B. is "safe and well though a prisoner." W., who is on leave, wired us.

I shan't write to-morrow, as if all goes well it will be a race between this card and myself to get home first. The very best of love to you.

. . . .

III

STORM AFTER CALM

Back to Duty.

BACK to work and my old friend Archie quickly. I was on bombing yesterday, not very far over the lines though, and there were about —— of us. It was a wonderfully pretty sight to see the bombs going down in a string, dwindling, and finally disappearing below. Bags of Archie were flying around, but my "machine" was not hit at all. I was first up to-day and we had a non-stop flight of nearly three hours, ranging some batteries. The weather was pretty dud, but W. and I managed all right. S. is missing, as perhaps you have heard. He was on a long bombing stunt. He is reported unhurt and prisoner of war.

• • • •

I shot a bullet into the air,
It fell to earth I know not where.

When we were up to-day P. emptied a

drum of ammunition from the gun over the lines—not firing at anything in particular, but just to test the gun. The empty cartridges as they were ejected landed with clockwork regularity on the top of my head. I said to myself, " This is some hail."

Last evening E. and I went in a tender to the battery we had been working with in the morning and saw the wonderful ruins of a town near there. We were really quite close to the lines, but luckily there was no shelling, and we got back O.K.

We have a game here now which is something like tennis. Instead of racquets and balls, we use a rope quoit, which must be caught and returned as per tennis, but must not be held in the hand or thrown over-arm. I had a game of solo yesterday with three others, and I have discovered two people who are frightfully keen on " Scramble Patience." Gee whiz ! One of them knows practically all Gilbert and Sullivan by heart as well. Isn't it extraordinary how " Scramble Patience " and Gilbert and Sullivan always seem to go together ? We went for a walk last evening, and sang the Nightmare song through, and several from " Patience " and the " Yeomen," etc. We are getting a tennis court made after all ; it is progressing quite well.

• • • •

A Good Story.

Here is a story as it was told to me. One of the best pilots at the front one day crashed on the top of some trees. He got out, and was standing by the remains of his machine when a Staff Officer came up and remarked, "I suppose you've had a smash!" "Oh n-no," stuttered the pilot, who was, to put it mildly, somewhat savage, "I *always* l-land l-like this." The Staff Officer, annoyed in his turn, said, "Do you know whom you are speaking to? What is your name?" To which: "Don't try to c-come the comic p-policeman over me. Y-You'll f-find my n-number on my t-tail p-plane."

I was called at four this morning, and leapt heroically into the air at five. It was confoundedly cold, but I had a thick shirt and vest, a leather waistcoat, double-breasted tunic, the fleece lining from my waterproof and a leather overcoat, so I just managed to keep warm.

. . . .

Yesterday I was in the middle of a game of tennis when, with one or two others, I was ordered to fly over to a neighbouring aerodrome to be ready for a special job in the morning. I landed there all right and reported, and went into the mess-room slap

into the arms of an old schoolfellow. I was chatting with him when the C.O. sent for me to explain the nature of the work before us. I went into his office, and the other pilots detailed for the work came in, and to my utter astonishment I recognised another old schoolfellow. I had dinner with him and stayed the night there. This morning the weather was too dud for our work and it was washed out, and we returned to our aerodromes. I brought back my bed, valise, pyjamas, etc., with me in the passenger seat of the aeroplane. I had to fly back without my goggles, as I had lost them at the other aerodrome.

• • • •

A Fokker's Flight.

One of our pilots had my machine up to-day and met a Fokker. His (or rather my) machine was damaged, but he spun round and let fly at the Fokker. Then his gun jammed, but to his surprise the Hun went off home "hell for leather." The R.F.C. have absolutely got the Huns "stiff" in the air, partly owing to our "hot stuff" new machines, and partly to the pilots. But a Fokker running away from the machine L. was flying must have been a comical sight. My machines always seem to be unlucky when in the hands of other pilots.

To-day I have done very little else but sleep, and the weather has done very little else but rain. I tried to get my hair cut this morning at a village not far away, but was informed that it was after twelve o'clock. "Surely not," I said, and the barber said "Si," and unblushingly produced a watch showing about ten minutes to twelve, and motioned me away. However, I got some magazines, and chocolate, and some new shaving soap and razor blades.

. . . .

A Tail Piece.

Just now I bid fair to outdo H.'s record of unpleasant stunts, as I nearly had a third within twenty-four hours. The first one was just to whet my appetite, so to speak, but although I only went a few miles over the lines I was Archied the whole blessed time. The Huns must have spent fortunes on Archie in the last week. I hit something with one of my bombs that made a colossal burst—probably some Hun ammunition. Yesterday they started on me just before I got to the lines, and, I think, went on until I was a good ten miles the other side. Then the Archies started from the place I was going to bomb, and clattered away for ages, but they were not nearly so good as those near the lines, as they haven't

got so much practice. There were some wonderfully near shots, and the machine was badly shaken by one which made a most appalling crash just behind the tail. I was horribly scared, of course. I looked round, saw the tail still there, said "Remarkable!" and went on. The Hun aerodrome was a very nice-looking place. It had two landing T's out—great white strips of sheet, and there was a machine on the ground. I dropped several bombs there, one landing on the road beside the 'drome and one by the landing T. I don't know if I hit any of the sheds or not, as it was rather cloudy, and I could not see the effect of all my bombs. When I had finished I came back with the wind, nose down, at *some* pace, and hardly got an Archie at all. I was jolly pleased when it was over, and pleased too (in a way) that I had been, as it really was interesting to be so many miles behind the lines and see their aerodromes, etc.

. . . .

Night Bombing.

Well, I went night bombing yesterday—rather an Irish way of putting it, though! I went up after dinner, and as it was a bit misty I signalled down "bad mist." They signalled to me to come down, but I wasn't having any, and

turned my blind eye to 'em and beetled off. You see, from the ground it didn't look misty, and so, as I didn't want any doubts on the subject, I sloped off towards the lines. I soon lost sight of the flares and then became absolutely and completely lost. Everything was inky black and I could only see an occasional thing directly below me. My mapboard was in the way of my compass, so I pulled the map off, chucked the board over the side, and then flew due east for about a quarter of an hour, when I saw some lights fired. I crossed the lines about 4,000 feet up and tried to find my objective, but it was no go. I went about four miles over, and came down to 2,000 feet with my engine throttled down, but could not even recognise what part I was over, owing to the mist. Then, to my surprise, the Huns loosed off some Archie nowhere near me, so I expect they couldn't see *me*; but it looked ripping. They got a searchlight going and flashed it all round, passing always over the top of me. Then some more flares went up from the lines, and I could see the ground there beautifully, as clear as day, and some deep craters, but it did not show me sufficient to enable me to recognise what part of the lines I was over. Deciding it was hopeless, I set out for home, flying due west by my compass. It seemed ages before I picked up

the aerodrome lights again, and I was afraid I might have drifted away sideways, but I spotted them all right, and just as I was nearing them, passed another of our machines by about 200 yards in the darkness. He was a wee bit lower than I was, and as he passed I could see his instrument lights in his little cabin. I then switched on some little lights I had on the wing tips, and flashed my pocket lamp—you know, the one I had in Germany and at Penlee—and then gave an exhibition of spiralling and banking in the dark. They said it looked topping from the ground. Then I signalled down "N.B.G." and came in, "perched" (with all my bombs on, of course), and made a perfect dream of a landing.

Altogether I had really enjoyed myself, and would much rather do night bombing than day bombing. The only thing that annoyed me was that I couldn't find my target, 'cos the bombs would have looked so pretty exploding in the darkness. I didn't get up until about twelve o'clock this morning, and I am playing tennis at 5.15, so it has its advantages.

A little red spider has just landed on me and buzzed off again; that's lucky, ain't it?

. . . .

Have just had a forced landing. M. was up with me, and I yelled to him to work the throttle from his compartment. He smiled benignly on me, not understanding or taking much heed. Finally I stood up, waved my arms at him, and shouted. He turned round, and, thinking that I had a mad fit on, put his thumb to his nose and extended his fingers. Finally, realising what I wanted, he tried the throttle, but did not succeed in working it, and in his turn waved his arms. We must have been a comical sight up there, wildly waving our arms at each other. As we couldn't use the engine and were descending, I warned M. that we were going to have a forced landing. He tumbled to that all right and removed the gun from behind his head and put it on the front mounting, just in case—er—we met a hedge! We reached the aerodrome all right a couple of thousand feet up, and spiralled down. Just as I was coming in to land, another machine cut in ahead of me, but as I had no engine I couldn't "wai-at" (like Peg), but just perched behind him and dodged him. So all ended well, for I made a perfect landing.

Gesticulation in Mid-Air

• • • •

Have just been up with E. We spotted a

storm coming up and ran for home. I came down to land, and found myself going too fast, so had to go round again. Great loss of dignity! I came in again, this time right at the end of the aerodrome, and closed the throttle, but the blessed machine went on flying, and I switched off just in time to prevent running out of the aerodrome. The throttle had become incorrectly set and the engine continued to run at half speed, although the throttle was entirely closed. We just got in before the rain came down.

• • • •

I was up 8,000 feet this morning, but the whole sky was clouded over and one could not see the ground. Flying just above the clouds it was gorgeous; one felt like leaning out and grasping a handful of snow and making snowballs, the clouds were so fluffy and white. I had a splendid game of tennis yesterday, and was in topping form. Lightning services. Swish!

• • • •

To-day has been "some" day. It started raining in the early hours and is still going strong. We are going to have floats fitted to the machines so as to take off the lakes!

• • • •

A Firework Display

Inasmuch as I was out all yesterday afternoon trying to get my hair cut, I was unable to write to you. Sorry. I was up at 2.45 a.m., and of course it was pitch dark. I left the ground shortly afterwards by flares, and had hardly got up a thousand feet when my engine began to misfire, go " chug-chug," and lose its revs. I signalled that I was descending, and came down, trying not to come in too low, as I was afraid my engine might not pick up. Result : I came in too high (not having had time to get used to the dark), and had to open up my engine and crawl round again at a couple of hundred feet. Again I essayed to land, but failed, and by this time I was absolutely furious with myself. I gave a glance at the rev. counter, and saw that the engine had found its revs. again and appeared to be running smoothly ; so, feeling that fate had willed me to stay up, I sent down " Engine O.K. now," and went off to the lines. Just after I left the aerodrome, clouds came up, and the C.O. would not let the next pilot go. I found my way quite well (in a blue funk, though, lest my engine should let me down), crossed the lines, picked up the road I was to follow, and finally reached the place I was to bomb. Here I ran into clouds and had to come down to between 1,000 and

2,000 feet. I dropped my bombs all right, and saw them explode—as good as a Brock's firework display. Moreover, I heard the bangs from them, and felt the machine bumped by the rush of air caused by the explosions. Flying back by compass, I soon picked out some flares which I headed for. Realising that I was over the wrong aerodrome, I looked round, spotted ours, got there, did a good landing, reported, and went to bed again.

• • • •

My Flight-Commander has gone home after being out nearly eleven months. We are all sorry to lose him. I am sure there is no better Flight-Commander in all France.

• • • •

I have just come down from a long and rather boring job with E., which took us from 1.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the upper regions. I had trouble with my engine yesterday, and had a forced landing, managing to get into the aerodrome and land in a cross wind. I had a repetition of the stunt to-day when testing it. We have now solved the trouble—a semi-choked petrol pipe. I am booked for tennis shortly, so will write more another time.

• • • •

A Mixed Grill

Well, I have a little news for you this time. To let you down lightly, I will first tell you that I am having several new walking-sticks made, and with your usual Sherlock Holmes intelligence you will deduce, quite accurately, that I have carefully and conscientiously reduced a B.E. 2C. to its molecular constituents—in other words, " crashed it."

Now don't worry, as I am perfectly all right and thoroughly enjoying life.

To sum up my work for the last twenty-four hours, I have had three forced landings, four hours'-odd flying, and one night flight, and a crash—not bad, eh ?

The three forced landings within that short space of time constitute almost a record. It was with my own machine, and each time some trouble with the engine broke out when I had got up 500 feet. Each time that we thought that we had discovered the trouble and I took her up again, she cut out just the same. By great good luck I managed to get back into the aerodrome. On one occasion I had bombs on too ! Now the machine is being practically pulled to pieces and altered by almost raving mechanics.

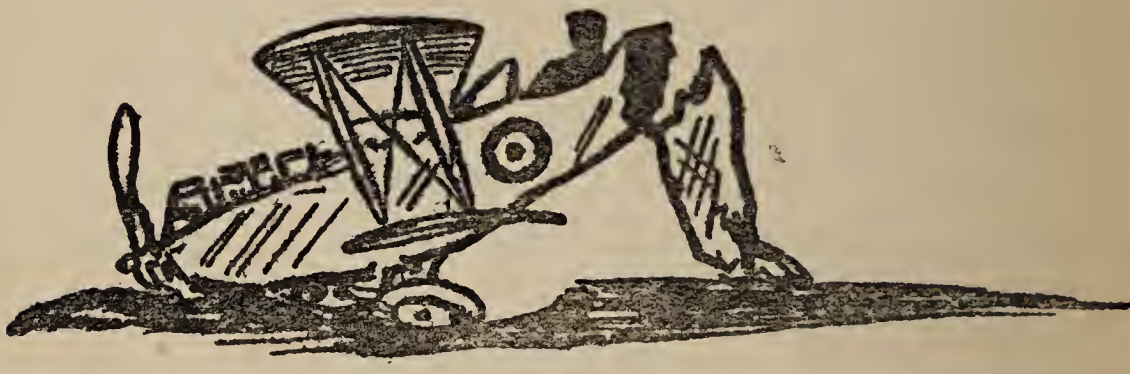
I had, as I wrote you yesterday, a three and a half hours' non-stop flight, and later was down for night bombing. I was all on my

own, and several people said they thought it was too misty. However, the C.O. asked me if I would like to try, and I said I was quite willing, and got ready.

I went up all right, though from the time I passed the last flare I saw absolutely nothing. There was a horrible ground mist, worse than it looked from the ground, and with no moon everything was black as ink. I could not tell whether I was flying upside down or anyway, and the machine was an old one and not very stable. I looked round at the flares and found I was flying all on the skew, left wing down, and I put that right ; but not being able to see even a white road directly below me, I knew it was hopeless trying to leave the vicinity of the 'drome, and signalled that I was coming down. So down I came.

I had been told to land down wind, owing to trees being at the other end of the 'drome. Well, there wasn't much wind, but what little there was I had pushing me on instead of holding me back. Likewise I lit a flare at the end of my wing, and although that enabled me to see the ground directly below me, I couldn't tell my height. I expected to touch ground by the first flare, but owing to these things and the fact that I was flying a strange machine the engine of which " ticked over "

rather fast, I did not touch ground at the first flare—but at the last. The landing was all right, but I plunged merrily on into the pitch darkness until I came to a nice new road and a ditch which pulled up y^e^ machine with a "crunch"! It at once began to take up peculiar attitudes, similar to those of a stage contortionist, and endeavoured to mix up its tail and rudder with the propeller. At any rate, this is how the machine looked a second afterwards :



The flare on the wing tip was still burning, and I had hardly time to get over my surprise at the bombs not bursting, when it occurred to me that there might be a lot of petrol knocking about. "This is no place for me, my boy," I thought, and undid my safety belt double quick and slid down one of the wings to the ground.

Meanwhile some dozens of breathless mechanics and officers arrived at the double,

and made kind inquiries as to my health. I am absolutely certain they were infinitely more scared than I was, and they all seemed relieved when I told them I was all right. I then lit a cigarette (as being the correct thing to do), observing with satisfaction that my hand was quite steady, and walked up to the C.O. and apologised. "Oh, that's all right, as long as you are all right: J—, just ring up the Wing, and tell them our machine has landed."

Everybody was bucked that I got out all right. One of our pilots said he didn't know how I managed to land at all, and thinks I was jolly lucky.

At any rate, it is experience and it didn't hurt me in the least, so I have nothing to grumble about. By the way, I don't expect to get my next leave much before Christmas at any rate, as there is none going here just now.

• • • •

I had a good game of tennis yesterday, and took up my machine to test it again. This time the engine ran perfectly and I did some splendid stunts coming down. When I had landed, an officer who was visiting the aerodrome came up and thanked me for my "beautiful exhibition." I felt inclined to pass the hat round. I have just come down

now, and have been taking photos. Archie was scarce owing to clouds, but the clouds made it harder for me to photo. Made a topping landing.

• • • •

Just come down from a shoot. G. was up with me, but I did the shoot. We got some pretty good Archie at us, and as the artillery did not shoot well, I dropped a couple of bombs on the target. I must get tea, and then to tennis.

• • • •

I have not much news to-day, except that I have had a splendid game of tennis, and a rather pleasant bombing raid. We went a long way over, past a Hun aerodrome, and got hardly any Archie at all, owing to the clouds. I got a beautiful shot with one of my bombs, on a railway station—my objective. On the way back I did a spiral on the other side of the Hun lines, and one of our chaps, thinking I was a Hun going down, fired a drum of ammunition at me. I told him he must be a rotten shot, and had better have some practice on the range with me. Altogether it was quite a jolly flight.

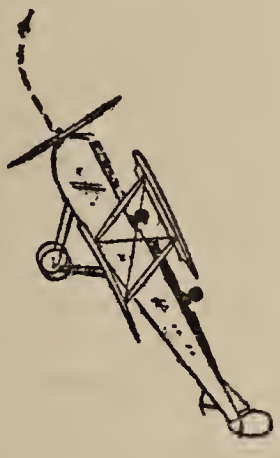
• • • •

Stalling

I was testing my machine round the 'drome this morning when it occurred to me to indulge in a few stunts. I obtained the sanction of my passenger, and we proceeded to do vertical banks, stalls, and tail

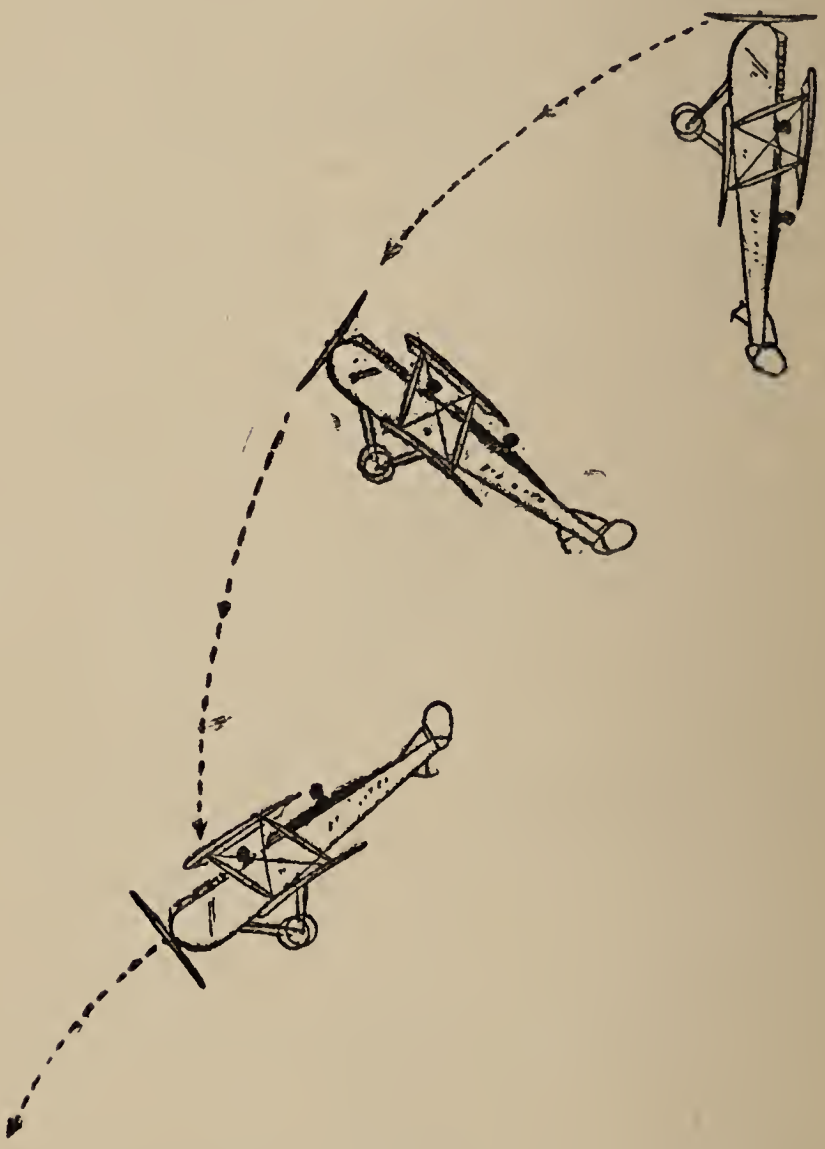
slides, much to the enjoyment of a group of officers who (I heard afterwards) were watching. I found it most enjoyable. Perhaps you don't know what "stalling" is. You are flying level so :

then you pull the nose of the machine up so :



till at last it becomes perpendicular, so :

when of course it gradually slows down and stops dead in the air, sticks there a moment, and then falls so :



and plunges on until it regains sufficient speed to bring it under control again and level. The feeling after the machine has stuck at

the top, and then falls down, is the "left your stummick up above—tube-lift feeling"—only more so.

• • • •

E. and I have been on a cross-country flight. The exhaust pipe blew off, and as the hot exhaust then became directed on the petrol tank, we decided to land, and came down in a nice little field, pulling up six inches from a ploughed field, and conveniently near a hospital. However, we didn't need the hospital, and soon got the machine to rights, but are stuck here owing to rain. We are, however, near a town, and are going to a "flicker show" to-night to see Charlie Chaplin. We have "fallen" among friends here, for there was an officers' mess within a hundred yards of where we landed, and we are being splendidly treated. Altogether an ideal place for a forced landing.

• • • •

My adventures of the past two days remind me of the great motor-cycle ride R. and I had from Devon to London. Let me see—it was the day before yesterday, I think, that I last wrote you, and told you about our forced landing. Well, E. and I and two others went to the cinema and saw "Charlie" in the evening, and stopped the night in an hotel.

The next day we made a few purchases, and when the rain stopped I went up alone from the field to dry the machine and examine the weather. I had hardly left the ground before I went slap into the clouds at 50 feet. I turned quickly and crawled back just above the ground, missing a factory chimney by a few yards, and plunged down again into a bigger field close by the other, pulling up a couple of yards from a hole in the ground. Later in the day when it cleared up we started again, and we were only a few miles away when the blessed exhaust pipe popped off. The petrol tank started getting hot again, so we had to come down, and it took us an awful time to find a decent field. They were all humps and bunkers and hazards, where, if we had landed, we should have gone head over heels. At last I found a good place, and perched, pulling up with the wing tip touching a bundle of hay. We stopped a car, and E. went on it to the aerodrome for help. However, I got a spare bolt from the car, and while they were gone repaired the damage myself, got two farm labourers to hold the machine while I swung the propeller, and started the engine myself. Then I clambered into the machine and went off alone, getting to the aerodrome just as my helpers were leaving.

• • • •

The weather is pretty dud. You remember the two games of Patience I used to play—the Four Aces and the Idle Year. They have caught on here tremendously ; every one from Flight Commanders down is playing them. I am thinking of sending to Cox's for my pass-book. Four of us played pitch and toss yesterday with pennies for two hours, and I lost sevenpence. The gambling fever has gripped.

I took up a Scotch sergeant a couple of days ago. He was a perfect " scream." " Can you tell me where ahm tae pit ma feet, an' where ahm no tae pit them." He quite enjoyed the flight, though, and looked round once with a huge grin, and said " Bon ! " By the way, I saw a very curious sight the other day, and a very rare one. I saw two of our shells pass in the air while I was flying. They were not near me, but I just got an impression of them as they went down. You can, I believe, see them go if you are standing behind the guns, but P. is the only one in our Flight who has seen them from the air.

I think the idea of dividing R.F.C. Squadrons up by public schools is splendid, but, alas ! impossible.

. . . .

An Air Fight.

Yesterday G. and I were doing a big shoot some four miles or so over the lines, and as it was a bit misty we went up to about 6,000 feet and sat right over our target for about a quarter of an hour. There was a Hun patrol of three machines buzzing around that neighbourhood, and when they got within a few hundred yards, I thought it was about time to draw G.'s attention to the matter. He sat up with a jerk, gave a quick glance round, never noticed 'em, and glued himself on his target again. "All right," I said to myself, "you'll wake up with a jump in a minute." To my surprise two of the Huns took no notice of us and went on, while the third circled about very diffidently watching us. Once he passed right over about 200 feet above us, and at that moment G. looked up. You could see the black iron crosses painted on a background of silver on the wings, and at that G. moved, and damn quickly too. I was busy watching the Hun, and didn't feel a bit excited or nervous. I watched and waited, and then suddenly the Hun stuffed his nose down and swooped behind us, and we heard his machine gun pop-popping away like mad. I waited till he was about a hundred yards away, and then did a vertically banked "about turn" and went slap for him, and let him have about forty rounds rapid at about seventy yards

range. G. had his gun ready to fire, when the Hun turned and made for home. We chased him a short way just for moral effect, and then went back to our target and on with our job. We were awfully surprised when he didn't come back. I suppose we scared him or something. This little chat took place about 7,000 feet up, and five miles on their side of the lines. Was up 'smorning; jolly cold. The guns are going like Rachmaninoff's Prelude.

• • • •

Before I stop I want to say this: If my adventures and amusements are going to cause you loss of sleep when they are over, you ain't a-goin' to hear no more. Please don't let them disturb you. I have generally forgotten all about them by the time your return letter arrives.

[END]

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